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SUBJECT: JORDAN CELEBRATES THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN WITH
PRAYER AND TREPIDATION

11. The following cable was drafted by one of our FSNs and conveys the mood of Ramadan 2002 in Jordan from her perspective.
12. Summary: While last year's Ramadan was marked with pessimism and lethargy, one would have thought that the situation wouldn't and couldn't possibly get worse. Last year, Jordanians greeted Ramadan with daily fresh images of wounded Palestinians and the added weightiness of the US campaign in Afghanistan. This year, the mood in Ramadan is one of "accumulated frustration", "further disillusionment", and "a case of hopelessness". Jordanians see a continued Intifada that seems to be going nowhere; an inevitable war on Iraq; political unrest within Jordan; a sinking economy; and a new war many believe to be targeted at Islam and Arabs at large. Faced with these simultaneous pressures, Jordanians are spending more time in reflection, and in mosques. End Summary.
13. Although this year's Ramadan is far from festive, the mood is not all one of gloom and tension. Homes and streets are decorated with lanterns and crescents (in the manner of Christmas); special-made food items are prepared and fashionably displayed; and cafes and hotels offer Ramadan Iftars and quiz nights at a good price. The King and Queen host Iftars for the underprivileged, other Royal Family members host Iftars for orphans, and donations and food packages are routed to the poor by the able and fortunate. The streets are emptied at sunset and grid locked after the stomachs are full. Non-Jordanian satellite TV stations host many politicized shows such as Horseman without a Horse -- about resistance to the British and Zionist colonization -- which are aired in prime time. (Note: Jordan Television (JTV) is not airing this program. However, Jordanians are able to view it either on the "Al-Manar" or "Dream" satellite stations. End Note.) This is followed by the story of Juha, the legendary figure who represents the underdog in society facing up to the government. Several lottery shows -- increasingly popular -- promise people a chance to win -- and offer a momentary escape from reality.
14. Beneath it all, however, people have become cynical and depressed about the reality they are forced to live. "I don't read the news as much because it's the same everyday." "It's supposed to be a holy month, but there is nothing holy or sanctified about it . . . there are still Israeli incursions and deaths everyday. Nothing has changed." "People are praying more because it leaves the responsibility to God to do something".
15. Consequently, more Jordanians are spending their time in quiet reflection and prayer. People are less politicized publicly, but their worries and frustration are evident. In contrast to last year, the number of people attending mosque prayers after Iftar has increased dramatically, especially among young women. There are now new facilities that make it easier for women to attend -- women can take their children with them and have the mosque management attend to them. The press has featured articles deeming it 'wrongful' for men to stop their wives from going to post Iftar prayers; there's a lot of Quran reading and more and more TV shows catering for this religious segment. We have also heard anecdotal reports that the number of Jordanians traveling to Mecca this Ramadan to perform Umra has also increased significantly over previous years. It is well known that in times of trouble people turn to religion, and Jordanians have a lot on their minds these days as the region inches towards conflict.
16. Jordanians have somehow adopted a new level of normalcy. While Ramadan carries on as usual, beneath it all lies a cautious ennui and trepidation about possible more difficult times to come.

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